

LISTENING TO YOUR MESSAGES

by Rabbi Ben Tzion Shafier

"Speak to the Jewish Nation and say to them, 'If a man or woman makes a vow to separate as a *nazir* to Hashem.'" – *Bamidbar* 6:2

The Connection between the Sotah and the Nazir

If a man suspects his wife of infidelity, he is to bring witnesses and warn her not to go into private quarters with the man in question. If she violates that warning, he is to bring her to the *kohain*, priest who will give her the "bitter waters" to drink. If she was falsely accused and was innocent, she will be blessed with children. If she was guilty, she will die a gruesome death.

This is the *parshah* of the *sotah*, suspected adulteress. Immediately after discussing these laws, the Torah details the laws of the *nazir* a person who takes a special vow of abstinence that includes not consuming wine, grape juice, or anything associated with grapes. Since these two sections are specifically placed next to each other, the Torah is teaching us that there is a connection between them.

Rashi is bothered by the connection. What does an unfaithful wife have to do with a man separating himself from worldly pleasure? Rashi explains that since wine brings a person to immorality, the man who witnessed a woman become a *sotah* should refrain from drinking wine. The Torah is teaching us that if a man sees a woman fall to such a low level, he should recognize the danger of intoxication and become a *nazir* to abstain from drinking.

This Rashi is difficult to understand. Either wine is dangerous or it's not. If wine brings to sin, then it should be avoided, regardless of whether he saw the *sotah* in her debacle. And if wine isn't inherently dangerous, then why should he make this vow, just because he saw her fall?

The answer to this question is based on understanding how Hashem runs the world.

Listen to Your Messages

The story is told that when the Chofetz Chaim learned about a major earthquake in Japan, he began crying. Someone asked him, "Why is the Rebbe so troubled?" He answered, "*Chazal* tell us: 'Calamities only come to the world because of *Yisrael*.' We were meant to hear that message."

The Chofetz Chaim was making a significant point. For reasons that only Hashem knows, a vast number of people were supposed to die that day. There are, however, many ways that their deaths could have come about. There are many messengers in Hashem's employ and many ways for Him to fulfill his decree. The reason those people died in such a violent manner was so that the Jewish Nation would hear about it and learn from it. The message was for us. The Chofetz Chaim heard the message, and he cried.

Learning to Listen

This seems to be the answer to the Rashi. Nothing in this world just happens. There are no random events. Nothing is by chance – nothing by happenstance. Hashem speaks to us. There are, however, many vehicles and media that He uses to communicate with us. Sometimes it's simply by arranging that someone should be in a particular place at a particular time. The fact that this man was witness to the *sotah's* disgrace wasn't by accident. He was supposed to see that event. Hashem was saying this to him, "Look how far things can go. Wine itself is a tool; it can be used for good or for bad. Other people may not have to be concerned, but for *you*, this is dangerous. See what happened to that woman? Take it to heart — it could happen to you."

A wise man listens to his messages and takes corrective action. In this case, the correct response is for that man to abstain from drinking by becoming a *nazir*. By putting these two unrelated concepts next to each other, the Torah is teaching us that we should be aware of the way that Hashem speaks to us through events of our lives.

This concept carries a powerful lesson. There is a Master to this World who orchestrates every event and every occurrence. And He speaks to us. The reason we have difficulty hearing the message is because He remains hidden behind the veil of natural occurrences. Our job is to cut through the fog, to see behind the smoke and mirrors, to recognize Who orchestrates these events, and to understand what He is saying to us. When things occur and we happen to be present, there is a reason. We were meant to hear it and learn from it. Whatever we experience, whether personally or communally, has a message for us, and we are supposed to be open to it and learn from it.

A Changed World

This idea is especially poignant in our times. On August 6, 1945, the Japanese city of Hiroshima was wiped off the face of the map, and reality was changed. With one explosion, neighborhoods, communities — an entire modern city — was obliterated. Never in the course of history was so much force placed into the hands of man. It took a while to grasp that we had entered a new era — the era of atomic power.

That power is now a threat to mankind. Iran, an evil regime on the brink of nuclear armament, thinly veils its aspiration to use those weapons against its sworn enemies, the United States and Israel.

North Korea, long known to have both a nuclear and chemical arsenal, with a barrage of belligerent acts now threatens its neighbors with wanton destruction. Civilization as we know it is in jeopardy.

And there is message in this for us. That message is for us recognize that Hashem is in complete control. He alone orchestrates and coordinates every event under the sun. He puts pawns into positions of power, using them to deliver his message. Is the threat real? In a sense, it is. If we don't heed the message, then the result could be devastation beyond anything we've seen before. If we do listen, then these pawns become revealed for what they were – mere puppets in the theater of life.

All that Hashem wants from each of us is to return to His ways, to follow the Torah with all of our heart and soul. He speaks to us in different ways. We have to listen to our messages.

Rabbi Shafier is the founder of the Shmuz.com – The Shmuz is an engaging, motivating shiur that deals with real life issues.

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